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SPRUL IN FAVOR OF PRISON FARMS

Governor Believes County Jail Inmates Should Be Given Wholesome Work

AUTHOR HITS FEE SYSTEM

Legislation to abolish county jails in this State and to substitute prison farms is favored by Governor Sprul. He said he hoped the State would soon be in a position to take over the care of the inmates in county jails.

"It is wrong to keep men penned up in cells without any work," said the Governor. "I was greatly interested in the suggestions for the establishment of prison farms so that the prisoners in county jails might be able to earn the cost of their maintenance. 'I believe the inmates of county prisons should have wholesome surroundings and be given useful work. I am in favor of the workhouse and for anything that tends to the betterment of convicts' conditions."

Governor Sprul has been following the EVENING PUBLIC LEDGER expose of conditions in the Philadelphia County Prison, at the current issue of the Atlantic Monthly Magazine, says relative to the Pennsylvania jails:

"A very bad feature in Pennsylvania is the fee system of compensating jailers which still exists in many counties and in some cities. Instead of being paid a salary the jailer is given a certain sum a day to feed the prisoners in his charge, retaining, as part of his compensation, such portion of this amount as is not paid out in food for the prisoners. For instance, if a jailer receives fifty cents per day per prisoner and his jail he will get \$25 to pay for food. Every cent that he does not pay out for food goes into his own pockets.

"A more vicious system it would be impossible to conceive—that of one man lining his own pockets in the same degree in which he withholds food from another."

Inspection Farce At Holmesburg Jail

Continued from Page One

the struggle, severely reprimanded the men he himself had sent to punish the convict.

"The visitor departed content, and the captain had the man beaten again and strapped to the floor without food for twenty-four hours. And this happened in 1922. The date of it all I don't know. Time came to mean nothing in Holmesburg.

"To be deprived of food from twenty-four to forty-eight hours is one of the commonest punishments, being administered for the slightest offenses, such as a whisper through a ventilator, a scrap of tobacco or even a slight humming, to while away dragging moments.

"The confinement for the majority was solitary—even the meals being served in the cells. And such meals—for breakfast burned rye with two pieces of bread, often so burned as to be unpalatable. For dinner the same bread with a stew is served.

"The keepers at Holmesburg lead comfortable, even lazy lives. I have seen, going about the houses in my capacity as barber, as many as twenty shoulders of lamb being prepared for the dinner of the fifty-six keepers.

"An easy life for them, yes. They play cards. They smoke. They joke and drink, one or two, and sit about and curse the men they watch. They take their exercise with the prisoners and many seem to need a lot of exercise.

"The prisoners are allowed twenty minutes a day in the court if the weather is of the best. One time, the weather not being of the best, we had no exercise for two or three weeks. No exercise at all is allowed on Saturdays or Sundays. So, you see, exercise up there means little. Of course, the men could walk about in their cells, but that makes noise, and noise means a foodless twenty-four hours.

Have to Mope in Cells

"Some of the 'favorites' are allowed to work in the shops or at scrubbing floors.

When I was at Holmesburg there were about eighteen men in the tailor shop and fourteen in the shoe shop. About fifty worked four hours a day cleaning the corridors. Some others worked at weaving and making stockings. The rest, 500 odd, sit through the day sewing and hearing nothing, going to pieces mentally and physically. Yet the work of the prison officials has been praised by visiting committees, visiting committees who see only the few men at work in the neat-looking shops and are hustled out. They do not see the hundreds of 'timers,' the brutal punishments or the meager rations and the fellows doing their solitary bit.

"During my five months at Holmesburg I was 'strapped' (foodless) for twenty-four hours. This happened to me three times because I was the victim of the dislike of the guard who reported me.

"As a barber, I attended to between four and ten of the keepers a day, sometimes doing what would be a \$2 job outside—shave, haircut, shampoo, and sing—and would receive, at great risk to myself of detection, a small handful of tobacco, perhaps enough for three or four smokes. I had lost all taste for tobacco, but, fortunately for me, the convict cook had not. He would often treat me a better meal or a piece of good meat for my meager supply.

How Meals Are Prepared

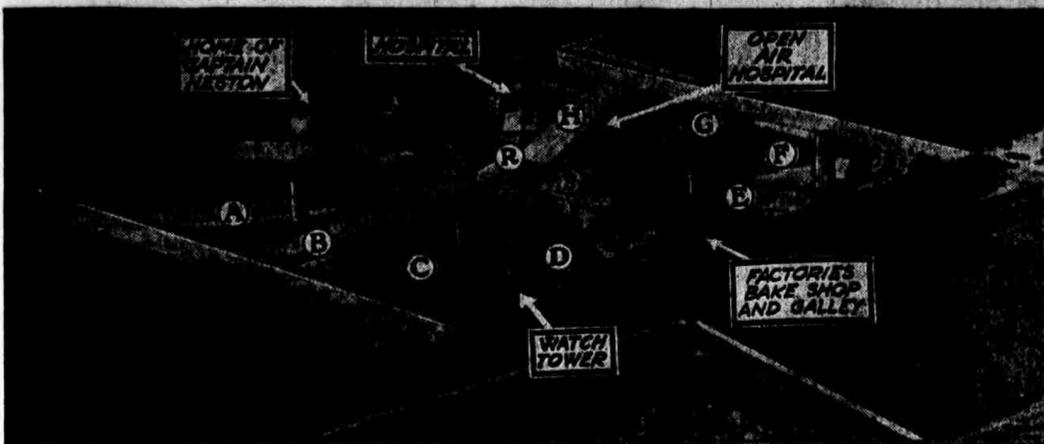
"The prisoners' meals were prepared in huge iron pots. And the pots were very old and so rusted that if they had ever been cleaned there would have been no pots left. Food left standing in these pots, for even a few hours, was contaminated. An inspector once urged a set of aluminum pots and almost got them. However, he died before the purchase was made. The order was countermanded and we never got them.

"Holmesburg takes a man's life—his heart away, and leaves him, at the time when he is aged, turned feeble to make his way in an antagonistic world, without the mind or the ability to succeed.

"Such waste of human lives—such treatment of human bodies—would not be permitted if all knew what I know—had seen what I have seen. I tell my experiences in the County Prison with the hope that something will be done by those with the power, to improve conditions at Holmesburg."

One convict cached tobacco in the boiler room. It appears that some workmen from the outside had listened to the pleas of the convict to steal in some tobacco, knowing, that while it was a violation of the rules, it would be an act of kindness to bring it in; the workman did. Part of this contraband made its way into the 'blocks'

THEY CALL THIS THE "WORST PRISON IN AMERICA"



A bird's-eye view of the Holmesburg County Prison. The letters A to G indicate the prison blocks; H is the open-air "hospital" for tubercular convicts—a regular cellhouse with its sides knocked out; R indicates the Rotunda. The Pennsylvania Railroad line to New York is shown alongside the prison wall.

by secret channels. The convict was finally caught with the tobacco and made to go without food for twenty-four hours.

Guards Get Petty Graft

Ex-convicts say that tobacco was passed out by the keepers, or "screws," to several convicts working in the tailor shop, who kept the uniforms of their keepers looking spick and span by cleaning and pressing them every week. This practice, it is understood, is still in effect.

"Petty graft that the keepers received in the way of shaves, hair cuts and other barber work, such as Cusano told about, has been cut out by order of Captain Heston, who is the deputy in charge. About three weeks ago, Captain Heston discovered that a num-

ber of keepers who were getting barber work done in prison were paying for it with a piece of chewing tobacco or enough cigarette tobacco to make three or four smokes.

The first thing Heston did was to order the barber chairs broken up, and then he read the riot act to the keepers who were instrumental in having the no-smoking and no-chewing rules violated.

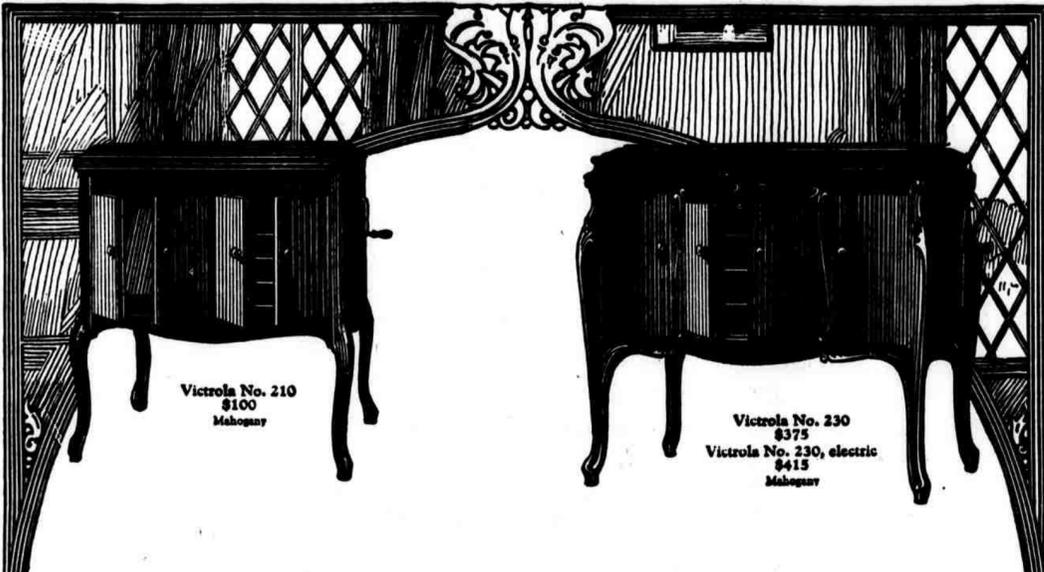
Last week a new convict, Wesley Walker, who was taken to City Hall to appear as a witness against I. Austin Wolfe, convicted yesterday of being a receiver of stolen goods, complained about conditions as he found them in Holmesburg. Walker, when asked to tell what he knew about things in general, at first did not want to talk.

"You know I've still got seventeen months to do up there," said Walker, "and if I tell just what I know about that prison, after serving nineteen months, maybe they will take away my working privilege. Still, if there is anything that can be done to help us poor devils up there I am willing to take a chance.

"I got three years in the County Prison, and when I was sent up there they put me in a cell all by myself, and there they kept me for three months. The food was awful, but it was a case of eat it or starve, so Wesley ate it, and he's still eating it. There are lots of fellows up there that can't eat. They are always complaining about pains in the stomach, but keepers only laugh at them.

"I have never been punished, because I never did take a chance and talk nor smoke, but I have seen lots of the boys punished for breaking the rules. Because I did not break the rules they put me out scrubbing and whitewashing. I won't get paid for it, but that doesn't matter.

"I get out of my cell during the day and I can say a word to someone—that was something I did not dare do while I was locked in 'doing solitary.' Every day I have been up there I have heard complaints from someone. It's always about the food they give us, but maybe it will get better. I hope so, for I certainly don't see how I am going to last seventeen months more on the treatment they give a fellow in that county jail."



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MAN HELD AS DOPE ADDICT

Prisoner Says He Has Taken Cure Five Times Without Success

Herman Chun, who confessed being a dope addict, was held in \$2000 bail for the Grand Jury by Magistrate Ben-shaw today after \$1000 worth of narcotic drugs had been found in his home, Seventeenth street near Erie avenue. Chun told the magistrate he has been an addict for eleven years and has taken a cure five times.

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